

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ROME 10801

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PINT, IT
SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH MINISTER OF INTERIOR COSSIGA

SUMMARY. DURING A PRODUCTIVE LUNCHEON MEETING WITH MINISTER OF INTERIOR COSSIGA JULY 2, WE AGREED THAT THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS (DC) HAD WON A REPRIEVE AND THAT IT WAS NOW TIME TO MOVE TOWARDS URGENT REFORM AND REJUVUNATION OF THE PARTY. COSSIGA HAS REMOVED HIMSELF FROM CONSIDERATION AS THE NEXT PRIME MINISTER AND IS SUPPORTING BUDGET MINISTER ANDREOTTI WHO IS THE INDIVIDUAL BEST CAPABLE OF GAINING SOCIALIST (PSI) SUPPORT. COSSIGA BELIEVES THE US AND OTHER ALLIED COUNTRIES SHOULD ENCOURAGE THE SOCIALISTS TO COOPERATE WITH THE DC AND URGED THAT WE RENEW OUR INVITATION TO DEMARTINO TO VISIT THE UNITED STATES. HE THINKS THAT IT WILL BE NECESSARY TO CEDE TO THE COMMUNISTS (PCI) THE PRESIDENCY OF ONE OF THE CHAMBERS OF THE PARLIAMENT, BUT HOPES THAT THE PCI WILL NOT RECEIVE THE CHAIRMANSHIP OF ANY PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES. COSSIGA IS STRONGLY OPPOSED TO PCI ENTRY INTO AN ITALIAN GOVERNMENT, BUT SUPPORTS A CONFRONTO WITH THE COMMUNISTS BASED ON CONCRETE PROPOSALS FROM THE MAJORITY TO WHICH THE OPPOSITION WOULD BE OBLIGED TO RESPOND. COSSIGA OBVIOUSLY IS AN IMPORTANT FIGURE ON THE PRESENT ITALIAN POLITICAL SCENE. HE IS THINKING OF VISITING THE UNITED STATES LATER THIS YEAR. END SUMMARY.

1. I HAD A BENEFICIAL EXCHANGE OF VIEWS AT LUNCH ON JULY 2 WITH MINISTER OF INTERIOR FRANCESCO COSSIGA. AT THE ONSET, CONFIDENTIAL

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I STRESSED TO HIM THAT THE DC SHOULD BE COMPLIMENTED ON THE

FACT THAT THE COMMUNISTS DID NOT ACHIEVE THEIR TWO MAJOR GOALS, I.E., TO BE THE PARTY OF THE RELATIVE MAJORITY AND TO HAVE THE LEFT FORCES RECEIVE 51 PERCENT OF THE VOTE. NEVERTHELESS, IT HAS TO BE RECOGNIZED THAT THE DC HAD MERELY BEEN GIVEN A REPRIEVE AND THAT IT WAS NOW TIME FOR THE PARTY TO GET DOWN TO THE SERIOUS BUSINESS OF RENEWING ITSELF AND PROVIDING THE NATION WITH A STRONG, EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP. I ADDED THAT WHILE WE ARE NOT SUPPORTING ANY PARTICULAR FACTIONS OR LEADERS OF THE PARTY, WE STAND READY TO PROVIDE WHATEVER ENCOURAGEMENT AND ASSISTANCE WE CAN TO ALL THOSE WORKING TOWARD THIS END.

2. COSSIGA SHARED COMPLETELY MY ASSESSMENT OF THE SITUATION, AND SAID THAT THE DC NOW HAS TWO OR THREE YEARS IN WHICH TO PROVE IT IS CAPABLE OF DOING THE TYPE OF JOB THAT NEEDS TO BE DONE. HE INDICATED A VERY STRONG DESIRE TO SEE HIS PARTY REJUVENATED AND REFORMED. REGARDING THE PRESENT POLITICAL SITUATION, HE SAID THAT HE HAS DECIDED AFTER GREAT THOUGHT AND CONSIDERABLE CONSULTATION TO REMOVE HIMSELF AS A POSSIBLE CANDIDATE FOR THE POST OF PRIME MINISTER SINCE HE LACKS THE NECESSARY EXPERIENCE AND POLITICAL SUPPORT. DEFENSE MINISTER FORLANI, WITH WHOM HE CONSULTED, HAS TAKEN A SIMILAR DECISION, AND BOTH OF THEM BELIEVE THAT THE MOST REALISTIC DC CANDIDATE FOR THIS JOB SHOULD BE ANDREOTTI. EVEN THOUGH THEY BOTH HAVE DIFFERENCES WITH ANDREOTTI, HE IS PROBABLY THE ONLY DC LEADER AT THE PRESENT TIME WHO COULD GAIN THE TYPE OF SUPPORT FROM THE SOCIALISTS (WITH A PUSH FROM FORMER PARTY CHIEF MANCINI) NEEDED TO FORM A GOVERNMENT, AND WHI HAS ENOUGH CLOUT TO MOVE TO ELIMINATE SOME OF THE HISTORIC LEADERS OF THE DC. (COMMENT: IT WOULD BE CONVENIENT FOR COSSIGA IF ANDREOTTI WERE TO BE "BURNED" BY HEADING A DIFFICULT INTERIM GOVERNMENT).

3. REGARDING THE SOCIALISTS, COSSIGA SAID IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE DC TO FORM A GOVERNMENT UNLESS IT HAD THE SUPPORT OF THE SOCIALISTS OR AT LEAST A MAJOR PORTION OF THEM. AT THIS POINT, HE FEELS IT ESSENTIAL THAT ITALY'S FRIENDS WORK TO ENCOURAGE THE PSI TO RETURN TO COOPERATING IN A GOVERNMENT WITH THE DC. BOTH THE BRITISH LABORITES AND THE GERMAN SOCIALISTS, WHO HAVE A FAIR DEGREE OF INFLUENCE OVER THE PSI, SHOULD BE UTILIZED AS AVENUES TO CONVEY TO THE SOCIALISTS

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THAT THE ONLY ROAD FOR THEM IS WITH THE DC AND THAT IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT IF FREEDOM IS TO SURVIVE IN ITALY THAT THEY SHOULD JOIN FORCES WITH THE DC RATHER THAN WITH THE COMMUNISTS. AT THE SAME TIME HE BELIEVES THAT THE US SHOULD RENEW ITS INVITATION TO PARTY SECRETARY DEMARTINO TO VISIT THE UNITED STATES. ADDITIONALLY, THAT US SHOULD CONSIDER INVITING PARTY VICE-SECRETARY CRAXI AND OTHERS TO AMERICA TO GIVE THEM A FEELING OF BELONGING AND TO INDICATE THAT THEY ARE PART OF A

TEAM. A FURTHER STEP WHICH COULD BE TAKEN WOULD BE TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF GRANTEES (IVL'S) INVITED TO VISIT THE UNITED STATES WITH A FAIR SHARE OF THESE GRANTS GOING TO SOCIALISTS.

4. COSSIGA IS STRONGLY OPPOSED TO PCI ENTRY INTO AN ITALIAN GOVERNMENT. PERSONALLY, COSSIGA WOULD RATHER NOT SEE THE COMMUNISTS GAIN A PRESIDENCY OF ONE OF THE CHAMBERS OF THE PARLIAMENT OR THE CHAIRMANSHIP OF ANY OF THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES. REALISTICALLY, IT MIGHT BE IMPOSSIBLE TO PREVENT THE PCI FROM GETTING PARLIAMENTARY POSTS. COSSIGA DOES NOT

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 ROME 10801

EXDIS

BELIEVE IT WOULD BE PARTICULARLY DANGEROUS TO PERMIT A COMMUNIST TO BE THE PRESIDENT OF ONE OF THE CHAMBERS SINCE THESE ARE ESSENTIALLY SYMBOLIC POSITIONS WITH VERY LITTLE REAL POWER. IT WOULD, OF COURSE, GIVE THE PCI A CERTAIN DEGREE OF RESPECTABILITY, BUT REALLY NOT GREAT AUTHORITY. HOWEVER, A CHAIRMAN OF A COMMITTEE HAS CONSIDERABLE POWER, AND COSSIGA STRONGLY OPPOSES CEDING ANYTHING TO THE PCI IN THIS AREA.

5. COSSIGA IS CONVINCED THAT THE TIME HAS ARRIVED WHEN CONSULTATIONS WITH THE PCI MUST TAKE PLACE OUT IN THE OPEN. THE DC MUST BE IN A POSITION TO MAKE STRONG PROPOSALS KNOWN TO EVERYONE. IT WILL THEN BE UP TO THE PCI, FROM ITS POSITION IN THE OPPOSITION, TO MAKE SUGGESTIONS AND COUNTERPROPOSALS. FROM COSSIGA'S STANDPOINT, THIS TACTIC WOULD HAVE THE ADVANTAGES OF PUTTING TO A PUBLIC TEST THE THESES WHICH THE PCI HAVE BEEN ADVANCING IN RECENT MONTHS AND WOULD PERMIT THE DC TO CAPITALIZE, BY GOING TO THE PEOPLE, ON PCI OPPOSITION TO

CONSTRUCTIVE LEGISLATION AND PROGRAMS. AT THIS POINT, I INTERJECTED THAT THE US GOVERNMENT HAS NOT MADE ANY CHANGE IN ITS POSITION AS FAR AS THE PCI IS CONCERNED.

6. THE MINISTER RECOGNIZED THE REALLY TOUGH DECISIONS WHICH HAVE TO BE MADE BY THE NEXT ITALIAN GOVERNMENT. AT THE FOREFRONT OF THESE IS THE NEED TO REDUCE THE BUDGETARY DEFICIT AND TO IMPROVE THE PERFORMANCE OF THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN NUMEROUS AREAS INCLUDING TAX COLLECTIONS. COSSIGA IS AGREED THAT ONE OF THE COUNTRY'S GREATEST WEAKNESSES, WHICH HAS A MAJOR IMPACT ON THE GOVERNMENT'S MONETARY PROBLEMS, IS CONFIDENTIAL

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ITS FAILURE TO COLLECT TAXES ON AN EQUITABLE BASIS.

7. IN ADDITION TO ANY ECONOMIC/FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE THAT THE US MIGHT BE IN A POSITION TO PROVIDE IN THE FUTURE, COSSIGA THINKS IT IMPORTANT THAT WE FOCUS ON HELP TO THE ITALIAN MILITARY. AREAS WHICH HE PARTICULARLY STRESSED WERE INCREASING WORKING CONTACTS AND LIAISON, UPGRADING MILITARY EQUIPMENT, AND PROVIDING TRAINING. THIS TYPE OF ASSISTANCE WOULD, IN HIS VIEW, BE PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT FOR THE FUTURE WELL-BEING OF THE COUNTRY, ESPECIALLY IN TERMS OF DISCOURAGING THE COMMUNISTS FROM ANY ADVENTUROUS ACTIONS.

8. WE ALSO TALKED ABOUT A MAJOR PUBLIC RELATIONS EFFORT WHICH THE PARTY MUST MAKE TO CONVINCE THE ITALIAN PUBLIC THROUGH THE MEDIA OF THE NECESSITY OF MAINTAINING A VITAL, VIBRANT AND SMOOTH-FUNCTIONING GOVERNMENT AND ECONOMY. HE AGREED THAT THE DC HAD NOT PERFORMED AS WELL AS IT COULD HAVE IN THE PUBLIC RELATIONS AREA, AND THAT IT MIGHT BE WELL TO APPOINT A FULL-TIME PUBLIC RELATIONS CHIEF FOR THE PARTY WHO IS NOT TIED DOWN BY PARLIAMENTARY RESPONSIBILITIES. GIVEN THE DC RECOVERY IN THE NATIONAL ELECTIONS, COSSIGA THINKS THAT THE DC, IF IT PLAYS ITS CARDS RIGHT, MIGHT FIND A SLIGHTLY BETTER RECEPTIVITY AMONG THE GENERALLY LEFTIST ORIENTED MEDIA AT THIS TIME.

9. COSSIGA THINKS THAT A UNITED EUROPE IS A MAINSTAY INSOFAR AS KEEPING ITALY VIABLE IS CONCERNED, AND HE HOPES THAT WE WILL DO ALL THAT WE CAN TO TRY TO GET THE FRENCH TO UNDERSTAND THAT THE FORMATION OF AN ELECTED EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT IS OF GREAT IMPORTANCE TO THE FUTURE OF A DEMOCRATIC ITALY.

10. IN MY OPINION, THE MINISTER IS OBVIOUSLY A REAL COMER AND AN INDIVIDUAL WHO HAS A FUTURE IN THE DC. AT THE MOMENT, HE IS NOT OVERLY OPTIMISTIC, BUT HE IS ALSO FAR FROM PESSIMISTIC. HE RECOGNIZES THE NEED FOR THE DC TO ACT RESOLUTELY AT THE CURRENT TIME, AND HE NOTED THAT BOTH PRESIDENT LEONE AND HE ARE IN ACCORD THAT A NEW GOVERNMENT SHOULD BE FORMED IN

THREE WEEKS OR LESS, IF POSSIBLE. ANYTHING BEYOND THAT, HE
FELT, WOULD AGAIN LEAD TO IMPATIENCE ON THE PART OF THE PUB-
LIC WHICH WOULD START ASKING WHETHER THE DC HAS REALLY CHANGED.
FINALLY, COSSIGA TALKED OF A POSSIBLE WORK/PLEASURE TRIP WITH
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HIS FAMILY TO THE UNITED STATES LATE IN THE SUMMER OR IN THE
FALL. IF THE TRIP MATERIALIZES, HE WOULD LIKE TO BE ABLE TO
SET UP A FEW APPOINTMENTS THAT MIGHT BE HELPFUL TO HIM BOTH
IN HIS WORK AT THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR BUT ALSO IN HIS ROLE
AS AN EMERGING DC LEADER. VOLPE

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